

PLANNING BOARD & PLANNING DEPARTMENT

Fiscal Year 2012

INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes the land use, planning, and zoning activities of the Amherst Planning Board and Planning Department during Fiscal Year 2012. In FY 12, in addition to the Planning Board, the Planning Department also provided principal staff support for the Zoning Board of Appeals, Design Review Board, Historical Commission, Local Historic District Study Committee and Local Historic District Commission, Town/Commercial Relations Committee, Amherst Redevelopment Authority, the Community Development Advisory Committee, the Housing Partnership/Fair Housing Committee, Housing and Sheltering Committee and Disability Access Advisory Committee. Please also refer to the Annual Report for each of those Boards and Committees for more information on their activities.

CURRENT PLANNING

As in previous years, development issues, permit applications, and Zoning Amendments (including amendments related to Master Plan implementation) occupied much of the time of the Board and Department during FY 12.

Table 1 provides a statistical review of the Department's activities, including the various permits it oversees, and zoning and other regulatory changes.

Table 1

<u>Planning Board – Land Use & Zoning Activity</u>		
A.	<u>Review & Action</u>	<u># of Applications</u>
1.	Planning Board Special Permits	2
2.	Form A (Approval Not Required) Subdivisions	12
3.	Cluster Subdivision	0
4.	Standard Subdivision	3
5.	Subdivision Amendments	0
6.	Subdivision Lot Releases	7
7.	Subdivision/Site Plan Escrow Releases	0
8.	Street Name Changes	0
9.	Site Plan Review Requests	7
10.	Sign Plans Approved/Signs Reviewed	2
11.	Lighting Plans Approved	1
12.	Revised Final and/or Landscape Plans Approved	2
13.	Scenic Road Applications Reviewed	0
14.	Ch. 61 Removals Reviewed	1
15.	Ch. 61A Removals Reviewed	0
B.	<u>Review & Recommendation</u>	
1.	Zoning Amendments	5*
2.	Rules & Regulations Amendments	0
3.	ZBA Special Permits/Variations	31
4.	Street Acceptances	2
5.	Street Discontinuances	0

*Three zoning amendments were large Village Center Form-based design amendments

Some of the more significant planning development proposals and issues of FY 12 included the following:

Commercial/Institutional

- Site Plan Review approval for Atkins Farm Market for construction of a 48 KW ground-mounted photovoltaic array system west of the new warehouse
- Site Plan Review for The Lord Jeffery Inn, to amend SPR2010-00008, and Special Permit, to extend hours of operation for the accessory restaurant and outdoor dining and to allow the accessory use of live and pre-recorded entertainment in the restaurant, bar, banquet and outdoor patio
- Site Plan Review for Amherst Montessori School for construction of an addition to an existing building and revised parking and drainage improvements
- Site Plan Review and Special Permit for Amherst College for renovation and construction of an addition to an existing dormitory at 67 Northampton Road (Seligman House), including parking lot and site improvements, and modification of front yard setback
- Site Plan Review for Amherst College for renovation and construction of an addition to an existing building at 79 South Pleasant Street (former First Baptist Church building), including parking lot and site improvements.

Residential

- Site Plan Review approval for three single-family homes to be converted into two-family homes, one of which is privately owned and two of which are owned by Amherst College.

Zoning Amendments

The Zoning Subcommittee and Planning Department staff worked on five (5) Zoning Amendments during FY 12 and held two Zoning Forums to solicit citizen input and recommendations on desired zoning changes. Ultimately five (5) Zoning Amendments were reviewed by the Planning Board and brought to Town Meeting, two (2) were adopted by Town Meeting and three (3) were defeated.

- Official Zoning Map Conversion – Article 16, Fall 2011 Special Town Meeting Warrant, to amend Section 2.1, Zoning Map, of the Zoning Bylaw, by designating the Town of Amherst Geographic Information Systems (GIS) map as the “Official Zoning Map”, was adopted by Town Meeting on November 9, 2011.
- Village Center Rezoning – Article 17, Fall 2011 Special Town Meeting Warrant, to amend the Official Zoning Map for North Amherst Village and Atkins Corners, and amend the Zoning Bylaw, including Articles 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 12, as well as Section 3.3, Use Classification and Standards and Table 3 Dimensional Regulations and add a new Article 16, Form-Based Zoning, to add a new layer of form-based design regulations for new form-based zoning districts, was defeated by Town Meeting on November 16, 2011. However, parts of this article having to do with the definitions of “Apartments” and “Townhouses” were adopted by Town Meeting on November 16, 2011.
- Residential Parking Design Regulations – Article 26, Annual Spring 2012 Town Meeting Warrant, to amend Sections 7.00 and 7.1 of the Zoning Bylaw, to add new requirements for residential parking design was adopted by Town Meeting on May 16, 2012.
- Village Center Rezoning – Articles 24 and 25, Annual Spring 2012 Town Meeting Warrant, to amend the Zoning Bylaw to add Section 16, Form-based Design Regulations, and to amend the Official Zoning Map for the Atkins Corner Village Center area and the North Amherst Village Center area were defeated by Town Meeting on May 9, 2012 and May 14, 2012 respectively.

MASTER/COMMUNITY PLANNING

Efforts continued on a number of long-range planning issues, while new issues and projects also involved the time and attention of the Planning Board and Planning Department.

UMass Draft Master Plan

On February 1, 2012, the Planning Board heard a presentation from representatives of UMass Campus Planning, Dennis Swinford and Niels la Cour, on the UMass Draft Master Plan. On February 15th the Board held a follow-up discussion on the presentation and the potential for working with UMass to coordinate town/gown planning efforts

Community Development

On July 6, 2011, the Planning Board held a joint meeting with the Community Development Committee (CDC) to review the Draft 2012 Community Development Strategy (CDS), part of the process for the CDBG Grant Application. The CD Strategy serves as a mini-master plan, summarizing community priorities and listing activities and action steps that the Town will complete in the near future. On August 3, 2011 the Planning Board held a joint public hearing with the CDC to receive comments and suggestions from local residents regarding the CD Strategy. Town staff and the CDC informed a broad spectrum of the population about this meeting in order to receive their suggestions and recommendations. There was outreach to all town boards and committees, the Amherst Human Service Network, the Council of Social Service Agencies of Hampshire County, and to all town departments. Nathaniel Malloy, Associate Planner, continued to work with the CDC to develop the Community Development Strategy and prepared the CDBG Grant Application for the next round of funding.

Village Center Rezoning and Gateway Visioning

On September 7, 2011 the Planning Board held a public information session with consultants from The Cecil Group on the proposed new form based rezoning for North Amherst Village Center and Atkins Corner Village Center. The Board continued to work on Form-based Code and rezoning of North Amherst and Atkins Corner Village Centers through May 2012.

On September 7, 2011 the Planning Board met with Amherst Redevelopment Authority Chair, John Coull, for an update on the Gateway Visioning Project, the final report for which had been published in July 2011.

Disability Access Advisory Committee

The Disability Access Advisory Committee (DAAC) continued to review projects and provide advisory opinions and recommendations to the Massachusetts Architectural Access Board (AAB) for applications requesting waivers from compliance with accessibility standards. The Planning Department provides staff liaison to this committee, which also reviews applications for Site Plan Review and Special Permits that involve public access. Through the staff liaison, Nate Malloy, the DAAC makes recommendations to the Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals.

Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP)

Town staff and boards and committees used the Town's Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) to support grant applications for water supply protection, land conservation, and expansion and improvements to the Town's recreational facilities, in particular the LAND and PARC grant programs. The Plan is used in conjunction with the Master Plan to help determine areas most

appropriate for land conservation and development, and helps guide zoning and other land-use policies. The OSRP is valid from 2009-2016, at which time it will need to be updated.

Historic Preservation

The Historic Commission supported the Local Historic Study Committee (LHDSC) as it researched and discussed the proposed Local Historic District centered on the Dickinson Museum. The LHDSC held monthly meetings and public forums to engage residents of the district. There was initial support for preserving the character of the neighborhood and integrity of the homes. The LHDSC continued with research and public outreach to help determine the final boundaries of the district and specific requirements of the draft bylaw.

On March 7, 2012, the Planning Board met with representatives of the Local Historic Study Committee (LHDSC) for a presentation and discussion on the Preliminary Study Report for the Proposed Dickinson Historic District.

Throughout FY 12 Nathaniel Malloy, Associate Planner, worked with the LHDSC to develop a Local Historic District Bylaw. At the Annual 2012 Spring Town Meeting Article 27 was adopted by Town Meeting to add a Local Historic District Bylaw and to create the Dickinson Local Historic District.

The Planning Department continued to assist the Historical Commission with its ongoing implementation of the 2005 Amherst Preservation Plan, including the development of proposals for CPA funding for historic preservation projects. These projects included the restoration of the Civil War Tablets; an architectural study of the Hawthorne Property to determine feasibility and cost of renovating the existing farmhouse into two affordable units; the restoration of Hope Community Church; improvements to the Historical Society; and work in West Cemetery. The Annual Spring 2012 Town Meeting appropriated a total of \$87,000 in CPA funds for historic preservation projects. The Historical Commission and Design Review Board were also involved in the process of reviewing and making recommendations for the design of the Town Flag. The Commission reviewed a number projects on the Amherst College Campus, ranging from renovations to demolitions to new construction.

A link to the Amherst Preservation Plan is here: <https://amherstma.gov/index.aspx?NID=765>
(Note: This is a large file.)

Downtown

In FY 12, the Planning Department continued to pursue downtown revitalization projects involving such issues as parking, public open space, historical issues, and public infrastructure projects.

The multi-year streetscape redesign and reconstruction of downtown sidewalks continued. The Planning Department assisted the Department of Public Works with development of designs for new sidewalk improvements on Spring Street and the Town Common parking lot.

The Department worked with the Tree Warden, Public Shade Tree Committee and others on downtown street tree issues and the development of designs for streetscape improvements in other areas.

Housing

The Planning Department assisted the Housing Partnership/Fair Housing Committee (HP/FHC), a newly formed Housing and Sheltering Committee, Amherst Housing Authority (AHA), and the Community Preservation Act Committee with analysis and development of projects to protect existing affordable housing and provide for the creation of new affordable units. The HP/FH Committee continued to review plans and CPA proposals for the development of 42 affordable units of rental housing at Olympia Oaks, as well as support the study of historic preservation and adaptive reuse of the Hawthorne property for affordable housing. As one of the partners of the CPA request to purchase the Hawthorne property, the HP/FH Committee helped lead the public outreach process, co-chairing public meetings with the LSSE Commission. The culmination of this public process was the preparation of a report to the Town Manager with recommendations for reuse of the property for affordable housing.

In September 2011 the Select Board dissolved the HP/FH Committee and the Committee on Homelessness in an effort to consolidate resources into one group that would work cooperatively to address a range of housing issues from homelessness to affordable housing to impacts of student housing. The Select Board appointed the Housing and Sheltering Committee as a new committee in April 2012, with one representative from the former HP/FH Committee and one representative from the former Homelessness Committee. While the Select Board refined the charge and mission of this new committee, town staff supported the work at Olympia Oaks, the Hawthorne property at 235 East Pleasant Street, and other housing projects in town.

Staff Planner Nathaniel Malloy served as liaison to the Housing and Sheltering Committee, assisting them with the development of a management plan and an action plan. Many of the committee members were new to housing issues and the general workings of town, such that many of the first meetings were filled with trainings about CPA, CDBG, and the housing needs of the community.

Planning staff and the Planning Board's Zoning Subcommittee continued to research and further develop amendments to the Zoning Bylaw to encourage affordability in new residential development. See Zoning Amendments.

Rail Service in Amherst

Planning Department staff continued working on ensuring future rail access for Amherst in FY 12. The Department worked with the Central Corridor Coalition, the Central Corridor Working Group (a steering committee of the Coalition), the Pioneer Valley Regional Planning Commission, representatives of MassDOT, Planning Board members, and representatives of local MA communities to promote the improvement of the Central Corridor (the New England Central Railroad (NECR) line) to provide rail passenger access connecting Amherst with communities and institutions in western Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Vermont and, via a connecting rail stop at Palmer, with eastern Massachusetts and Boston. The Central Corridor project will help restore and ensure future passenger rail service in Amherst following completion of the Knowledge Corridor project (which will move Amtrak rail service to Northampton). Passenger rail service for Amherst—the site of the largest state university flagship campus in New England—is an essential part of a sustainable, responsible passenger rail network for southern New England.

Planning Department staff participated in public events and meetings in MA and CT in support of the Central Corridor project. Staff also helped to draft and coordinate letters of support from Amherst for federal rail transportation grants applied for by NECR, and coordinated efforts to include the Central Corridor as a regional transportation priority for the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission.

Office of Conservation and Development

In May 2009, the Planning Department staff helped complete a one (1) year process to relocate the Inspection Services Department into the same office as the Planning and Conservation Departments. During FY 12 the merging of these Departments continued to absorb a great deal of staff effort and included devotion of Planning Department staff towards further refinement, implementation and utilization of the MUNIS permit software program. The effort to create the Office of Conservation and Development has provided a coordinated and efficient place for citizens, business owners, and potential applicants to access information and meet with staff members.

Staff of the Department of Conservation and Development implemented a plan to integrate the staff of the Community Development Department into the Department of Conservation and Development. The Community Development Department staff included Roy Rosenblatt, Director, and Ruth Taylor, Administrative Assistant. Mr. Rosenblatt and Ms. Taylor became integral members of the Department of Conservation and Development.

Over the course of FY 12, as Mr. Rosenblatt implemented his retirement, Nate Malloy, Associate Planner, assumed many of the responsibilities of Mr. Rosenblatt. These included working with the Housing Partnership/Fair Housing Committee and Community Development Committee, preparing the annual Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) application and administering the Block Grant. Mr. Rosenblatt finally retired in January 2012, after several decades of service to the Town.

Collectively, these efforts have resulted in a significant consolidation of departments and resources into a single Office of Conservation and Development, which now includes Planning, Conservation, Inspection Services and Community Development.

STAFF ASSISTANCE/PARTICIPATION

Internal Staff Working Groups

During FY12, Planning Department staff participated in the following internal staff working groups, among others:

- * Development Group
- * MUNIS Working Group
- * Land Use Group (LUG)
- * Safe and Healthy Neighborhoods Group

Boards and Committees

Planning Department staff provided professional support and technical assistance to numerous Town boards and committees, local and regional boards, as well as Amherst citizens, community groups, other communities, and others. The Town boards and committees directly served by the Planning Department staff in FY 12 included:

- * Planning Board (22 meetings)
- * Zoning Subcommittee (28 meetings)
- * Design Review Board (12 meetings)
- * Zoning Board of Appeals (29 meetings)
- * Historical Commission (11 meetings)
- * Town/Commercial Relations Committee (5 meetings)
- * Disabilities Access Advisory Committee (12 meetings)
- * Redevelopment Authority (4 meetings)
- * Housing Partnership/Fair Housing Committee (3 meetings)
- * Housing and Sheltering Committee, established April 2012 (replaced the Housing Partnership/Fair Housing Committee) (2 meetings)
- * UMass Campus Facilities Planning Committee
- * Community Development Committee (11 meetings)
- * Local Historic District Study Committee (11 meetings)
- * Transportation Plan Task Force (9 meetings)

Other committees or bodies for whom the Planning Department provided more occasional assistance in FY 12 include:

- * Finance Committee
- * Select Board
- * Community Preservation Act Committee
- * Public Shade Tree Committee
- * Pioneer Valley Planning Commission
- * Valley Development Council (PVPC-sponsored body)
- * Joint Transportation Committee (PVPC-sponsored body)
- * Sustainable Knowledge Corridor Transit-Oriented Development Advisory Group (PVPC-sponsored body)
- * Amherst Regional Chamber of Commerce

Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program

During FY 12, the Planning Department staff provided the primary support for managing CDBG projects and applying to the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) for the Mini-entitlement CDBG grants. Planning Department staff also assisted other Town departments, boards, and committees in developing project proposals, and in preparing and reviewing related potential CDBG projects. The CDBG grant helped to fund numerous social service programs ranging from childcare tuition assistance to the Big Brother/Big Sister mentoring program to the food pantry at the Survival Center. Additional CDBG activities included funding for architecture and pre-development of Olympia Oaks, a 42 unit affordable rental housing project, funding for the design of the new Survival Center in North Amherst, and renovation of the Amherst Childcare Center that included new flooring and interior/exterior painting.

PLANNING BOARD MEMBERSHIP

During FY 12, one (1) new Planning Board member – Kathleen Ford – was appointed, and one Board member – Jonathan Shefftz – resigned.

At the end of FY 12, the Planning Board had nine (9) members: David Webber (Chair), Jonathan O’Keeffe (Vice Chair), Bruce Carson (Clerk), Stephen Schreiber, Richard Roznoy, Robert Crouner, Sandra Anderson, Connie Kruger and Kathleen Ford. There were no vacancies.

Planning Department staff attended the 2012 Citizen Planner Training Collaborative conference in Worcester.

PLANNING DEPARTMENT STAFF

Jonathan Tucker, Planning Director, completed his 27th year with the Department and continued to provide principal staff support to the Planning Board, Zoning Subcommittee, Town/Commercial Relations Committee, and Redevelopment Authority, as well as overseeing all activities within the Planning Department.

Christine Brestrup, Senior Planner, completed her 9th year with the Department and continued to provide staff support to the Planning Board, principal staff support to the Design Review Board and worked on various other Planning Department activities.

Sue Krzanowski, Administrative Assistant, completed her 24th year with the Department, offering administrative support to the Planning Department, Inspection Services, and Conservation in the consolidated Conservation and Development Department.

Jeffrey Bagg continued to provide principal staff support to the Zoning Board of Appeals. He worked on various other Planning Department activities, including Zoning Bylaw revisions and continued to enhance available online resources, integrated electronic transmittals into the review process and provided ZBA members with additional training.

Nathaniel Malloy, Associate Planner, completed his 4th year with the Department, providing principal support for conservation and planning grants, including the CDBG Mini-entitlement funds. He continued to support the DAAC, Historical Commission, Local Historic District Study Committee, HP/FH Committee and Community Development Committee. Towards the end of FY 12 Mr. Malloy was promoted to the position of Community Development Planner.

David Webber
Chair, Planning Board

Jonathan Tucker
Planning Director